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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6588
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 7664
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 3409
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 6377
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1744
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 1346
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 8025
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 8309
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000987

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SUBJECT: BHARAT BALLOT 2009: UTTARAKHAND SUFFERING FROM
LACK OF DEVELOPMENT, DIVISION AMONG ITS PEOPLE

REF: NEW DELHI 933

¶1. (SBU) Summary: PolOff and PolFSN traveled north to Uttarakhand on May 11 to assess the political landscape of this small state with five parliamentary seats up for grabs. In discussions with a mix of local journalists, academics, business leaders, and state civil servants, the themes that we heard over and over again were a need for jobs and development, the damage of corruption, and how the state needs an integrated plan to meet the different needs of the hill districts and the plains region to move the entire state forward. Another recurring topic was how both the Congress and the BJP treated Uttarakhand as a hill state instead of a composite of the two regions. Some of our interlocutors claimed that the state government has exacerbated the differences between the regions by favoring people from the hills when it came to the disbursement of development funds and hiring for government jobs. The conventional wisdom of political watchers was that the BJP and Congress would maintain control of the two parliamentary seats that each has in the state and one seat may switch from the Samajwadi Party to the Bahujan Samaj Party. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Driving into the capital city of Dehradun from its airport, PolOff noticed a distinct difference in the quality of life compared to that of western Uttar Pradesh, the state that Uttarakhand broke away from in 2000. Most houses looked like they had been stuccoed and freshly painted, instead of made of raw brick. Many of them were two stories. Trees are abundant and the air is fresher. The wide flat valley is surrounded on one side by forested hills, and on the other, by much higher mountains, a sharp reminder that we were in the foothills of the Himalayas. The two-lane road wound through forest for much of our thirty-minute journey to the capital.

Looks Like An Election

¶3. (SBU) Another noticeable difference from Uttar Pradesh was that in Uttarakhand the political parties had decided to put some of their limited campaign money - the amount they can spend is restricted by the Election Commission -- into the traditional party banners, posters, and billboards. Most pictured their national party leaders with the local

candidate to ensure that the cost of the advertising will come out of the national party's funds, not the candidate's. The regional Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party had put up some posters and billboards, but most belonged to the Congress party and the BJP. On May 11, the last day allowed for campaigning, we saw that the BJP and Congress had sound trucks out in one of the roadside villages. In Dehradun, a BJP motorcycle rally passed by our hotel a few times, with flags flying and the riders chanting their party's name. Rental cars were scarce in the capital because the political parties had rented them for campaigning; we paid twice the normal rate for ours.

Desperately Desiring Development

¶4. (SBU) Our interlocutors in Dehradun said the highest priority in the state is the need for development. Many places further up in the hills need schools, health care, and public transportation. The government-run hospital in Dehradun lacks the facilities to diagnose and treat cancer. Many roads are inadequate and lack guard rails, an important safety feature in an area where many roads have precipitous drop-offs at their sides. This issue was brought home on the two-lane road to Mussoorie, a hill station established by the British in the 1800s and one of Uttarakhand's main tourist attractions today; carved out of the hillside, the road has guardrails and small concrete barriers but little else to keep one from plummeting over the edge for thousands of feet should the driver's skills fail going around many of its

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hairpin curves. There is no shoulder next to the road for the most part.

¶5. (SBU) One journalist characterized the BJP-run state government as ideologically bankrupt and only focused on making money. He alleged the government had claimed falsely that Maoist insurgents were coming into the state, rounded up some Nepalese citizens to support these claims, and then requisitioned security supplies from the center to fight the threat the government had engineered. The government has also closed down three power plant projects because of environmental concerns and political pressure from Hindu nationalists opposed to disrupting the flow of the Ganges, which they consider sacred. The government supposedly wants to make Uttarakhand a tourism-focused state, but our journalist interlocutor said it has no policy for bringing more tourists into the state.

¶6. (SBU) Many of our interlocutors said that the previous Congress Party state government was horribly corrupt, but it also made progress in the development of the state during its tenure. They claimed that the public misses former Congress Chief Minister N. D. Tiwari, saying that he was the only one who had a vision for the state and could move initiatives forward. Now the state has a government that is corrupt but doesn't follow through on what it has been bribed to do.

¶7. (SBU) The assessment we received in Dehradun was that the BJP candidates are not talking about development during the parliamentary election campaign, but instead are making emotional speeches designed to appeal to voters' caste or religious identities. The Congress Party candidates aren't talking about the party's vision for the state either. Their campaigns are based on criticism of the BJP state government. If the BJP loses the electoral race, it will be a vote against the party's control of the state, not a vote for Congress. Currently, the BJP holds two seats in parliament, the Congress Party has two seats, and the Samajwadi Party controls the remaining one. A Dehradun business leader and former BJP supporter said that Congress is the only party qualified to rule India because the Prime Minister is an economist and former Finance Minister. He had doubts about the BJP's abilities to handle such issues.

18. (SBU) Many of our interlocutors took note of the race for the Haridwar seat, which has been designated as a reserved seat -- one set aside for scheduled caste or scheduled tribe candidates -- through the recent nation-wide redistricting exercise. If the Dalits and the Muslims - combined the two groups make up around half of Haridwar's electorate - support the BSP, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's party is likely to win the seat because the other half of the electorate will be split between Congress and the BJP. One of our interlocutors said that the BSP candidate, who is a Muslim, is best qualified because he is a former member of the legislative assembly and he "talks sense." It was not yet clear to our contacts, however, that the Muslim and Dalit communities would vote as a block.

19. (U) The Nainital-Udhamsingh Nagar parliamentary district features a three-cornered fight between the BJP, the BSP, and the Congress. Our interlocutors said that both the BJP and Congress Party were running strong candidates. The Congress candidate is the incumbent, K. C. Singh Baba. The BSP candidate has been working the constituency for two years. With Nainital as with Haridwar, the race will depend upon how cohesive the minority communities are in casting their votes.

Holy City of Haridwar Full of Resentment -----

110. (SBU) Haridwar, considered one of the holiest places in

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India, has many temples, with saffron-clad pilgrims walking along the road, billboards of Lord Ram, a large statue of the god Shiva near the river, and a profusion of ghats -- steps along the riverbank -- to ease the way for ritualistic bathing where the Ganges flows through the town. BJP campaign flags and billboards dominated the area; there were few Congress posters to be seen. Haridwar also has a noticeable population of people living in lean-tos made up of scrap material. Apparently not all of Haridwar's residents can afford to enjoy "Fun Valley," the water park sporting depictions of Winnie the Pooh and Shrek on its walls that is located among farmland and lumber yards on the road between Haridwar and Dehradun.

111. (SBU) We sat down with a group of community leaders, including professors, a businessman and a religious instructor who all supported the BJP, claiming only a national party like the BJP can run the country. They criticized the regional parties, such as the BSP and the Samajwadi Party, for caring only about parochial interests, saying that they are ill-equipped to take care of India's external affairs. Their ideal candidate for Parliament would be someone who adhered to the ideology of the national party, who led a clean life with no hint of corruption, but who was from the area and in touch with the grass roots. They assessed that the BJP candidate for Haridwar was close enough to that ideal to gain their support.

112. (SBU) Nevertheless, the discussants were quite dissatisfied with the BJP's running of the state and they said they've made that clear to the party. When Uttarakhand split from Uttar Pradesh, much of the impetus behind that fight was to break away from a capital that ignored the hill region. Now the reverse is happening and both the BJP and Congress treat Uttarakhand as a hill state and ignore the plains region, according to our interlocutors from plains-city Haridwar. They said that this is breeding resentment among the public towards the state government in the three plains districts. They claimed that the BJP sidelines any up and comers from the plains in its party; all of the political leadership is from the hills. Government jobs primarily go to applicants from the hills. Even development funds from the central government that were

specifically designated for the plains region have gone to waste because the state government refused to use them, instead demanding more money for the hills region.

¶13. (SBU) When Uttarakhand became a state, a regulation was instituted that no one can be considered a native of the state unless they can prove that they or their ancestors lived there before 1930. Otherwise, they are considered a permanent resident and receive fewer benefits from the state. This exacerbates the hills/plains divide because most of the people who moved into the state after 1930 settled in the plains region. Our interlocutors assessed that this growing resentment toward the BJP and Congress is opening up an opportunity for the BSP to win the Haridwar seat, which has fielded a local Muslim. No one gave the Samajwadi Party much chance of maintaining control of the seat.

¶14. (SBU) Comment: Uttarakhand's natural beauty and holy sites attract religious tourists as well as people trying to escape the heat of the great Gangetic plain. The young state has a long way to go before it can reap the fruits that were envisioned in 2000 when it became a separate state. Despite the poor development record and many resentments among the voters, the BJP is likely to maintain its control over two seats with the Congress keeping its two seats. The one seat that is most likely to change hands is Haridwar, if Mayawati and her candidate can consolidate the Dalit and Muslim vote.

BURLEIGH